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FOOTPRINTS

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Virginia Rich

AUTHOR

Bernhard Wall

ETCHER

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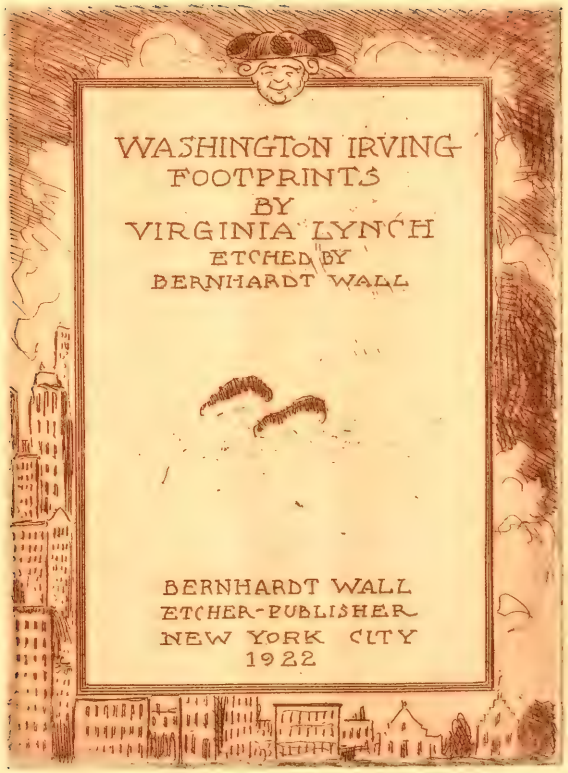
WASHINGTON IRVING
FOOTPRINTS
BY
VIRGINIA LYNCH
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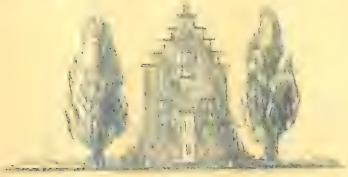
To My
MOTHER
Alevia VanPelt Lynch
whose
forebears figured
in the famous annals
of
DIEDRICH
KNICKERBOCKER



WASHINGTON IRVING—FOOTPRINTS

Most of the modern Jasons whose footsteps echo all day from the pavements of William Street, recognize in Father Knickerbocker's benign features the presiding genius of the great city. How many ever reflect that at 131 William Street, Washington Irving, the man whose whimsical fancy created the immortal Knickerbocker, first saw the light, April 3rd, 1783!

The devastating tides of time have obliterated all traces of the house and of the shop near by, where Washington laid his hand in blessing on his namesake's baby curls. 59 Ann Street is the only house, in this region of tortuous streets, re—

maining from that period. The ancient house, reached by a narrow alley, has retreated into the black shadows cast by her neighbors' flaunting newness.

Turn into Pearl Street, oldest of New York's streets! What a fortunate calamity, failure in business, forced Irving to a literary career! At Number 33, the firm of Tice and Lynch continue the business of Edgar Irving, the charming nephew of the author. Near by, Fraunces' Tavern dispenses hospitality as in the days when the boy Irving played hereabout.

Strange ships from distant ports, black-bearded

sailor-men drew the lad to the waterfront where he wistfully watched the white-winged craft fare forth and dreamed of distant and alluring lands, dreams partly fulfilled in later years, by his extensive travels in Europe. . . . . .

Long after, -in Paris, Irving wrote, There is a charm about that little spot of earth, that beautiful city and its environs, that has a perfect spell over my imagination. The bay, the rivers, and their wild and woody shores, the haunts of my boyhood, both on land and water, absolutely have a witchery over my mind."

Look out over the noble harbor from the Battery, where Irving loved to stroll! The name remains to remind us of the seaward-pointing guns. Saucy tugs, giant liners plow the waters then rippled by Liverpool packets and graceful sloops. . . Cross Battery Park with us, a favorite promenade, when Irving lived with Brevoort at 16 Broadway! Often the friends strolled on up to Cortland Street to visit the Renwicks. Castle Garden still remains, though Neptune has ousted Mars from the Castle Clinton of 1812, a reminder of Irving's military career on Governor Tompkins' staff. . . The young lawyer hung up his shingle yonder at 33 Wall Street. Near by, in Trinity, is Hamilton's grave, calling up a

picture of Hamilton's enemy, Burr, interviewed by his counsel, Irving, retained to defend the former Vice-President; Burr's unhappy plight appealed strongly to the young advocate's generous heart. Here, 115 Broadway, stood the famous City Hotel, where that memorable dinner was given when the famous author returned to his native city, after his seventeen-year sojourn abroad. Crowned with the laurels of the Old World, he was deeply moved by the plaudits of the new. His honest admiration for his country's progress disarmed those critics who saw, in his long stay

CITY HOTEL

abroad, an alienation from his native land. . "Our City! May God continue to prosper her" was Irving's toast, ending a rare and felicitous speech.

Northward along the old Post Road! At Eighth Street we turn west to Lafayette. . Those fine columns attest the former splendor of Colonnade Row, where our author once lived. Continuing on the Post Road as far as the old two-mile stone, let us turn our steps westward again to the gray brick house on Irving Place where "Mahomet and his Successors" was written. . What a graceful portico!

more lands than Irving ever dreamed of. . . Whirling northward beside the blue Hudson we remember how, in our author's boyhood, his love of adventure had been gratified by a voyage up the noble river, as venturesome an expedition in 1800, as a Polar trip would be today.

The romantic scenery of the Hudson deeply impressed him, and, later, furnished the stage whereon Rip Van Winkle and Ichabod Crane were immortalized. These fascinating tales, followed by those of Poe and Hawthorne, made American authors long pre-eminent in the short story form. . . .

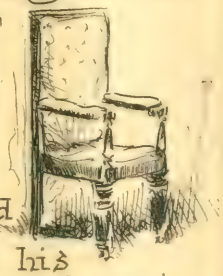
Sunnyside Lane, bordered by a brawling brook, ends at a gate where we dismount, walking thence

up to "Sunnyside," once the Van Tassel cottage, "Wolfert's Roost." The aged house "all made up of gable ends and as full of angles and corners as an old cocked hat" overlooks the silvery Tappan Zee.

SUNNYSIDE

Green vines cling to the gray stone. Fine old trees rear their leafy crowns towards the blue sky. "Come and see me and I'll give you a book and a tree" was Irving's irresistible invitation to a friend.

. . . We enter the house. In his little study, we see, in fancy, the bent figure in the worn arm-chair writing "The Life of Washington". The adjoining rooms exhale the charm, the dignity, the simplicity of the happy household Irving fathered. Here lived the beloved author, after he returned home, weary of wandering, until his body was borne along "the lazy country road"



winding up to Sleepy Hollow, where he had hoped some day or other, to sleep his last sleep. . . . . "1699," we read on the facade of the ancient Dutch Church, as we pass this very patriarch of churches. The bridge, adjoining, spans the Pocantico where the terror-stricken Ichabod clattered over the planks. The stream still murmurs on; but the quavers which, tradition says, long echoed hereabout, resonant emissions from Ichabod's marvelous nose, have died away. The whole region, loved haunt of his boyhood, retreat of his old age, has been invested with undying tradition by Irving's graceful pen.

Up the hill we stroll, to the simple stone marking the resting place of the father of American letters. Between the trees, shimmering in the sun, can be seen the river he loved. We turn away, thinking of his simple ambition, - "If I can, by lucky chance, in these days of evil, rub out one wrinkle from the brow of care, or beguile the heavy heart of one moment of sadness, I shall not have written entirely in vain."

Virginia Sykes

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